

# Table of Contents

A Message to the President.....	ii
Executive Summary .....	iv
Background .....	1
Hurricane Georges Devastates Puerto Rico: September 1998	
Housing .....	3
Rebuilding with Friends, Family and Government Assistance	
Mitigation .....	7
New Secure Housing Program: A Groundbreaking Approach to Hazard Mitigation	
Economic Revitalization and Sustainability.....	11
Rejuvenating Puerto Rico's Economy	
Energy.....	15
Empowering Puerto Ricans	
Transportation .....	18
On the Road to Recovery	
Facing Future Disasters .....	20
Taking Pride in Taking Responsibility	
Appendix A .....	22
Members of the President's Long-Term Recovery Task Force	
Appendix B.....	23
Acronyms	

# A MESSAGE TO THE PRESIDENT

President Clinton:

I am pleased to present “Faces of Recovery,” the final report from the Long-Term Recovery Task Force for Hurricane Georges in Puerto Rico.

This report highlights just a few of the tens of thousands of Puerto Ricans whose homes, businesses and communities were devastated by Hurricane Georges in September 1998.

Sixteen months later, their faces speak for themselves. Long-term recovery is well underway in Puerto Rico. I know we all take pride in Puerto Rico’s and the Federal Government’s response to this historic disaster.

But I am even prouder of what the faces in this report represent. By using the recovery from Georges to rebuild safer and smarter, these Puerto Ricans are protecting themselves, their homes and businesses from future disasters. They have taken the heartache from Hurricane Georges and turned it into a realistic hope for a safer future.

This is the message of *Project Impact: Building Disaster Resistant Communities*. Across America, we are facing disasters in a new way. While the people profiled in this report were victims of Hurricane Georges, they are committing their time, energy and resources to ensuring that they never again suffer such extensive disaster damages.

They are investing in their own futures and the futures of their children. I know you join me in applauding their efforts to protect themselves and everything they hold dear from future disasters.



FEMA Director James Lee Witt (left) and SBA Administrator Aida Alvarez (center) visit with a Hurricane Georges victim in Puerto Rico.

During past disasters, the Federal family has partnered to deliver disaster assistance to victims. Now, through *Project Impact*, communities are taking the lead and forming partnerships before disasters strike to prevent future disaster damage.

In Puerto Rico, 12 Boy Scout troops went door-to-door before the start of the 1999 hurricane season, sharing with their neighbors common-sense tips on how to prevent hurricane damage. These are the faces of the next generation of Puerto Ricans, who are taking pride in taking responsibility for the future safety of their homes, families and communities.

The Long-Term Recovery Task Force concludes its mission in Puerto Rico with this report and with the confidence that by embracing the philosophy of *Project Impact*, Puerto Rico will be better protected during future disasters.

*James L. Witt*

James L. Witt  
Chairman  
President's Long-Term Recovery Task Force

*In 1999, these Puerto Rican Boy Scouts became Project Impact's youngest, but perhaps most enthusiastic partners in disaster prevention.*





*The people and projects described in this report are proof positive that long-term recovery from Hurricane Georges is well underway. These are the faces of recovery in Puerto Rico.*

## Executive Summary

In response to the widespread devastation in Puerto Rico caused by Hurricane Georges in September 1998, President Bill Clinton activated the President's Long-Term Recovery Task Force to expedite the recovery process and assist the Government of Puerto Rico in addressing the disaster's lasting impacts.

The Task Force members, led by Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Director James Lee Witt, convened in October 1998 with their Puerto Rican counterparts to identify the major issues that would be critical to Puerto Rico's long-term recovery.

The primary concern was meeting the immediate housing needs of 31,500 Puerto Ricans who had to seek refuge in temporary shelters as a result of Hurricane Georges. Equally important was the longer-term goal of rebuilding safer homes and communities from the ground up, using effective risk prevention techniques so lives and property would be safer during future disasters.

This report highlights the partnerships that have made those goals a reality for the people of Puerto Rico.

By combining funds from several Federal disaster programs, thousands of Puerto Ricans were able to repair or rebuild their hurricane-damaged



homes. At 87 years old and a survivor of several natural disasters, Felix Vazquez de Jesus in Humacao is just one homeowner who successfully rebuilt his Georges-damaged home with government assistance. He also had a lot of help from family and friends, including a local pastor who designed the renovation project.

Across Puerto Rico, construction crews have broken ground on a truly groundbreaking mitigation project called the New Secure Housing Program. An unprecedented initiative, the New Secure Housing Program will create thousands of new affordable and disaster-resistant homes through a creative partnering of Federal and Government of Puerto Rico funding. This report looks at plans for the flagship New Secure Housing development in Toa Baja, where 223 residences will be built in compliance with Puerto Rico's new strict building code, far from the threat of floods and landslides.

Revitalizing Puerto Rico's economy was another major concern in the weeks and months following Hurricane Georges. The experience of Glidden Martínez, a poultry farmer in Utuado, speaks for countless Puerto Rican farmers and business owners who wisely used Federal and local resources, along with solid business practices, to weather the long-term challenges of economic recovery. Because of his success, and thousands of others like him, Puerto Rico's 1999 GNP grew at a rate of 4.2 percent to \$38 billion, the second time in only 20 years the economic pace surpassed 4 percent.

Hurricane Georges devastated Puerto Rico's roads, bridges and electrical power system. While temporary fixes might have provided short-term

solutions, the President's Task Force, along with the Government of Puerto Rico, insisted on using the rebuilding effort to not only recover from Hurricane Georges, but to prepare for future disasters.

With this goal and the help of Federal disaster assistance, the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority (PREPA) was able for the first time to provide the small community of Pezuelas, in Lares, with dependable electric service, which will soon supply power to the new municipal well. By carefully planning their rebuilding efforts, engineers at PREPA have used Hurricane Georges as an opportunity to improve their operations so they can serve a greater number of Puerto Ricans with a more reliable





property during disasters. The faces of these boys are the faces of Puerto Rico's next generation who are committed to being better prepared for future disasters.

The President's Long-Term Recovery Task Force concludes its mission with this final report and with the confidence that all Puerto Ricans are taking pride in taking responsibility for the future safety of their families and homes. ■

*After Hurricane Georges, Puerto Ricans redefined recovery as more than the process of repairing disaster damage. For them, recovery became an opportunity to prepare for future disasters and lessen Puerto Rico's vulnerabilities to natural disasters.*

source of electricity, even during unreliable weather.

Likewise, the rebuilding of the Victor Rojas Bridge in Arecibo, funded with Federal assistance, will result in a stronger bridge designed to withstand 100-year floods and earthquake forces.

The people and projects described in this report are just a few examples of the benefits inherent in long-term recovery planning. While the Federal family can take pride in having provided more than \$2 billion in disaster assistance to Puerto Rico in response to Hurricane Georges, the burden of long-term disaster recovery ultimately rests with the Government and people of Puerto Rico. The fact that they are succeeding is a tribute to them.

Finally, this report commends the efforts of 12 Puerto Rican Boy Scout troops who went door-to-door in the weeks before the start of the 1999 hurricane season, explaining to their neighbors how taking common-sense precautions can protect lives and

